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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN ENVIRONMENT UPDATE

December 2, 2005

1. Summary: This information is drawn primarily from the Kazakhstani press, and has not been verified. The opinions expressed in this report, therefore, should not be interpreted by readers as conveying positions and/or policy of the U.S. Government.

- Local Prosecutor Calls Tengizchevroil Negligent
- Baby Sturgeons Released into the Aral Sea
- Construction Begins on Toxic Waste Landfill
- Forest Fire in Ile-Alatau National Park
- Shungite Could Reduce Environmental Problems
- Shardara HES Director Says Riverside Villages Should Be Removed
- Parliament Ratifies Teheran Environmental Convention
- Program to Provide Drinking Water in Pavlodar Oblast Continues
- Second Phase of "SOS-Saiga" Project Began in Early November
- National Strategy on Avian Flu to be Ready by Year's End
- Kazakhstani Scientists Decipher Genome of H5N1 Virus
- Senate Adopts Law on Ecological Insurance

Local Prosecutor Calls Tengizchevroil Negligent

2. (U) Atyrau Oblast Prosecutor Batyr Zhazbayev alleged to the press that Tengizchevroil does not have good control over its operations. According to Zhazbayev, after a July 2 accident which resulted in the emission of 700 tons of pollutants, four more accidents occurred over four months. On the day of the accident, four employees of "Tengizchevroil" complained of acute toxic exposure to hydrogen sulfide and 183 people filed complaints to a local clinic. The damage was estimated at 17 million Tenge. The Environmental Prosecutor's office has charged two foreign officials at the company for being responsible for the accident and took the case to court. (Vremya, November 7, 2005)

Baby Sturgeons Released into the Aral Sea

3. (U) 30,000 baby sturgeons were released into the Maly Aral, the northern part of the Aral Sea, marking the beginning of a fish cluster in the region. The release became possible with the completion of the Kok-Aral dam, which has raised water levels in the Maly Aral. Two fish farms have been restored and 100,000 baby sturgeons were delivered from Atyrau. The remaining sturgeons will be released next spring. Specialists do not anticipate any problems with the release. (Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, November 2, 2005)

Construction Begins on Toxic Waste Landfill

4. (U) Western Kazakhstan Oblast began constructing a landfill for hazard class 1, 2, and 3 toxic wastes. The Oblast allocated 52 million Tenge from the 2005 budget for the project. The total area of the landfill is 18 hectares. Currently there is no toxic waste landfill in Western Kazakhstan Oblast and large enterprises are obliged to store toxic waste in big containers on their property. The absence of a landfill increases the risk of environmental pollution. (Kazakhstan Today, November 10, 2005)

Forest Fire in Ile-Alatau National Park

5. (U) A forest fire in the Bolshoy Almatinka gorge lasted for two days. Negligent tourists started the fire, which took more than 100 firefighters and 2 helicopters to extinguish. The fire quickly spread after it burned acres of Tien Shan spruce, which contains flammable oils. It will take 30 to 50 years to restore the forest. (Habar, November 7, 2005)

Shungite Could Reduce Environmental Problems

6. (U) Kazakhstani scientists are hopeful that shungite, a mineral found in Karelia, Russia, will solve environmental problems in Kazakhstan. Experiments have shown that shungite can decontaminate the soil, reduce radioactive and oil

contamination, decompose heptyl and oil products into ecologically safe compounds, neutralize mercury vapor. (Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, November 15, 2005)

Shardara HES Director Says Riverside Villages Should Be Removed

17. (U) According to Kudaibergen Erzhan, director of the Shardara HES, families should be resettled away from areas prone to flooding along the Syr Darya River. According to Erzhan, the local authorities are wasting time and draining the national budget in their efforts to prevent flooding by patching up holes in dams. In recent years the overflowing Syr Darya has flooded small riverside settlements and caused many problems. On November 14, Kazinform reported that the Aral-Syrdarya Water Basin Administration did not expect floods this winter because the oblast had carried out riverbank protection works at the most vulnerable places in the summer. (Press release of "Kazgidromet" RSE, MEP of the RK, November 25, 2005; Kazinform, November 14, 2005)

Parliament Ratifies Teheran Environmental Convention

18. (U) The Upper House approved a bill to ratify the Framework Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea, Interfax reported. The bill has been submitted to the President for signing. The Lower House passed the bill in September. The Convention was signed in Teheran by Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Russia, and Turkmenistan on November 4, 2003. Among the guiding principles of the Convention is the "polluter pays" principle, which implies that the polluter bears the cost of pollution including its prevention, control, and reduction. (Interfax, November 23, 2005)

Program to Provide Drinking Water in Pavlodar Oblast Continues

19. (U) Implementation of the "Drinking Water" program Pavlodar Oblast is moving ahead, according to Kazinform. In 2005, seven water mains were reconstructed in 5 districts. The water supply in 117 settlements will be improved through 2007 under the program. From 2001 to 2004, the water supply in 94 villages was improved, water mains in 33 settlements were reconstructed, and 61 water cleaning facilities were built. The central government and oblast budget allocated 1.2 billion Tenge to cover these improvements. (Kazinform, November 26, 2005)

Second Phase of "SOS-Saiga" Project Began in Early November

110. (U) The Seimar Social Fund provided Ohotzzoprom 10 cars and communication equipment to patrol, monitor, and assess the saiga population in Zhezkazgan, Kyzylorda, and Almaty Oblasts. The "SOS-Saiga" project started on June 23 and aims to protect Kazakhstan endangered saiga antelope. Poaching and predatory wolves are the main reasons for its disappearance. Saigas are hunted for their prized horns, which fetch \$100 per kilogram. The third phase of the project will begin in March 2006. The objective of the third stage is to protect young saiga antelopes from poachers and wolves. (Strana i Mir, November 25, 2005)

National Strategy on Avian Flu to be Ready by Year's End

111. (U) Kazakhstan's National Strategy on Avian Influenza Prevention should be ready by the end of the year. Specialists from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Republican Sanitary and Epidemiological Center are working on the strategy, incorporating recommendations from the WHO and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. The strategy calls for the creation of a system for constant monitoring, the establishment of diagnostic laboratories, and the purchasing of the Tamiflu vaccine, the only known effective means of combating avian flu. (newswire@apex.kz, November 30, 2005)

Kazakhstani Scientists Decipher Genome of H5N1 Virus

112. (U) Scientists at the Agricultural Research Institute in Almaty Oblast have deciphered the genome of the H5N1 virus, which opens the possibility of identifying if the strain is a Kazakhstani virus. Researchers at the Institute discovered that the Kazakhstani virus is 100% identical to the Russian virus and 99% identical to the Chinese one. Scientists at the Institute are confident they could produce vaccines in several months time, but are unable to do so because they lack funding. To combat avian flu, scientists have recommended the establishment of a biological safety center. The government is moving in this direction, having allocated 95 million Tenge to

fund the first year of the 2006-2008 Program for Biosafety. One of the program's objectives is the prevention of spread of the avian flu virus. (Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, November 30, 2005)

Senate Adopts Law on Ecological Insurance

13. (U) On November 23, at its plenary session, the Senate ratified the "Law On Mandatory Ecological Insurance." Minister of Environmental Protection Aitkul Samakova noted that the new law creates the legal basis for mandatory ecological insurance of liabilities of physical and legal entities carrying out environmentally hazardous economic activity, and for damage to health and property of third parties or the environment as a result of accidental pollution. The insurance sum for individual entrepreneurs will total 5 monthly index factors (MIF) and for legal entities will total 65 MIFs. (Kazinform, November 23, 2005)